

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 Mule Deer Quotas Outside the Biennial Quota Ranges

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

As mentioned at the June Commission meeting, there are no proposed changes to elk quotas. For deer quotas, FWP proposes a region-wide mule deer B-license (007-03) quota and quota range in Region 7 as below. No other changes are proposed.

- Increase the mule deer B-license (007-03) quota from 4,500 to 7,500.
- Restore the pre-existing (pre-2010) Region 7 antlerless mule deer B license quota range, changing the current upper quota range from 5,500 to 11,000.

Antlerless harvest is a very important component of mule deer management. In Region 7's highly variable prairie-breaks environment proactive prescriptive management, which the region adopted in 1982, has significantly dampened the wide population fluctuations seen when management was reactive and variable prior to 1982. Also, since 1982 landowner complaints about mule deer game damage have been declining steadily and significantly, and buck:doe ratios have increased.

Mule deer populations in the Region have recovered remarkably since a recent low in 2012. Deer seen on the Region's 14 trend areas in 2016 are 47% above long-term average and fawn recruitment has been very strong for the last three years. Deer numbers are now higher than they were during years when nearly 11,000 B licenses were sold. Now is the time to apply additional antlerless harvest to avoid the unsustainable high numbers and wide population fluctuations of the past. Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) guidelines have not been followed since 2014 when B licenses were eliminated, and this proposal would return the flexibility needed to manage to AHM guidelines. Supporting information in the season justification was supplied in the June commission packet. FWP biologists have proposed this change in a continuing effort to manage deer populations to objective, dampen wide population fluctuations, offer opportunity where biologically sustainable, and minimize conflicts on private land.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Sportsmen and landowners have generally recognized increasing deer numbers and expressed satisfaction with returning to regionwide antlerless tags because of the flexibility they offer. Landowners generally prefer the flexibility to adjust doe harvest on their land as they see fit. Formal public comment ran through June 24 and we received 40 comments. Among the 32 speaking to the Region 7 proposal there was an even split of 16 each in support vs. opposed. Other comments varied from too few deer to too many, not enough deer on public land, support for FWP being able to quickly respond to situations, and that FWP is only concerned about money.

Alternatives and Analysis

No alternatives were considered.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the proposed changes to the Region 7 007-03 mule deer B-license quota and quota range.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve the Region 7 007-03 mule deer B-license increase from 4,500 to 7,500 and increase the upper quota range from 5,500 to 11,000 as recommended by FWP.